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## Collaborative Ministries within the Vincentian Family

BY

SHAUN McCARTY, S.T.

### Introductory Remarks

In his charming little best seller, *All I really Need to Know I learned in Kindergarten*, Robert Fulghum reminisces while watching kids play hide-and-seek. He asks,

Did you have a kid in your neighborhood who hid so good, nobody could find him? We did. After a while we would give up on him and go off, leaving him to rot wherever he was. Sooner or later he would show up all mad because we didn't keep looking for him. And we would get mad back because he wasn't playing the game the way it was supposed to be played. There's *hiding* and there's *finding*, we'd say, and he would say it was hide-and-seek, not hide-and-give-UP and we'd all yell about who made the rules ... No matter what, though, the next time he would hide too good again. He's probably still hidden somewhere, for all I know.<sup>1</sup>

As he watches, he spies a kid under a pile of leaves in his yard and the others are about to give up on him. He considers telling the others where the kid is hidden or setting the leaves on fire to drive him out but finally settles for yelling out the window, "Get found, kid!" and scares him so badly he wets his pants, starts crying, and runs home to tell his mother.

Better than hide-and-seek, Fulghum says, he likes the game called "Sardines," in which the person who is It goes and hides and everybody else goes looking for him or her. When each finds the one who is It, they get in and hide together. Pretty soon someone laughs and everybody gets found.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I learned In Kindergarten* (New York: 1986), 54-56.

Fulghum goes on to say he thinks God is a “Sardines” player and will be found the same way everybody gets found in “Sardines” — by the sound of laughter of those heaped together at the end. “To all those who have hid too good,” he says, “Get found kid! Olly-olly-oxen-free.”

In our present pursuit of collaboration, perhaps we can engage in a “Sardines” rather than “Hide-and-Seek” approach to ministry in which Jesus is more likely to be found in the company of collaborators. In devising strategies and in seeking structures for the future, perhaps we need not ‘to hide so good’ in individual, competitive, and exclusive models of ministry, I suspect that by sharing quiet, faith, gifts, and laughter as we huddle with the Spirit, people will more likely find or be found in their quest of God.

As a member of one of the newer and smaller groups heir to the legacy of Saints Louise and Vincent, I am both gratified and humbled by your invitation to share in this event of ‘domestic ecumenism’ to share and to celebrate with other members of the extended family the somewhat neglected legacy of charity left by Saint Louise de Marillac.

Beginning with Sister Loretto’s creative “Life of Louise in Her Own Words,” you have explored personal, historical, and cultural contexts of Louise’s life; her spirituality, her generativity, and her final days. With your exchange of stories, you brought the legacy into the present in terms of personal experience. Now it is time to move to the future! I would suggest that these exercises in recapturing dynamic memories of the past are vital for the tasks of reinterpreting the legacy for the present and for creatively imaging the future.

I will try to provide a framework and stimulus for reflecting together on the future of one important aspect of this rich legacy — that of collaboration. Rather than just deliver a paper on the topic, it seems more appropriate that I lead you in a collaborative process. In sharing a ponderous first draft of this presentation with some sister and brother collaborators who also share the legacy of Louise and Vincent, they suggested that I not distract and tire you by just talking *about* collaboration. “Why not seize the moment,” they asked, “to have them *do* some collaboration by reflecting on collaborative experiences in ministry they may have had?” Since Sister Kieran also had asked me to lead you in some process, this seemed like a good idea. So, instead of one long and tiring talk, I will sandwich an exercise between two shorter ones; first, some introductory remarks now, and later, some concluding ones. I hope the slices of bread will not be too thick! I also trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us in some “meaty” sharing pertinent to the future of the

legacy.

The title of the presentation, "Collaborative Ministry within the Vincentian Family," sparked a reflection on my own experiences of collaboration with various branches of the Vincentian family. My most memorable experience came from an eighteen-year effort of chairing a committee entrusted with the revision of my community's constitution. This resulted in a joint Rule of Life with our sister community that has also been adapted by our two lay branches. The effort began with a renewal chapter in 1967 which eventually led me to preparatory studies at Saint Louis University. This brought me into contact with a kindred spirit, Vincentian Bill Eigel of happy memory, and later to an invitation (from Sister Mary Rose) to speak to a renewal group of Daughters of the Midwest Province. During the years of work on the Rule, I realized that to understand and to claim our own founding charism more deeply, it would be important to explore the Vincentian heritage that formed our own founder's spirit and sense of mission. That led to an extensive and rich experience of collaboration with the Daughters and Vincentians who helped me literally to follow the footsteps of Vincent from Pouy to Paris with many stops in between. Of particular help to me were Daughters Mary Agnes Barry and Margaret Flinton and Vincentian Fathers John Zimmermann, Bill Sheldon with the generalate community in Rome, and Raymond Chalumeau with his community in Paris.

It was during this pilgrimage that I made some chance discoveries of Vincent's friends, notable among whom were the neglected Louise and some latter-day followers and collaborators — Frederic Ozanam and his companions. These young men were mentored by another great collaborator — Daughter Rosalie Rendu. This discovery piqued my interest in this lay expression of the legacy. Further study of Ozanam led me to collaboration with the Society here in the United States by helping them link their Vincentian spiritual heritage with their ministries to the poor.

Over the years, my own Vincentian spirit has been further nourished on retreats, workshops, and the like shared with other Sisters of Charity rooted in an American translation of the legacy of Louise and Vincent by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. As a matter of fact, I am presently team-teaching with two Sisters of Charity of Halifax who collaborated with me in preparing for this presentation. So, you see, this has been an occasion for me to celebrate my own experiences of collaboration within the Vincentian family. It is more from this experience than from academic research that I make these remarks.

### Understanding the Terms

Perhaps it would help, at this point, to suggest some tentative working definition of terms.

Within this context, by "Collaborative Ministries," I mean coming together for mutual benefit to pursue a mission and to maintain fidelity to a spirit shared by distinct, yet related groups dedicated to the service of the gospel and Reign of God it proclaims.

"Coming together" means more than just doing or working together. Unless "co-labor" is taken in the sense of *opus Dei* (work of God). It would include *being* together in planning, supporting, challenging and, especially prayerfully reflecting/discerning together on experiences of mission and ministry as well.

"Mutual benefit" implies a reciprocity of giving to and receiving from each other in a spirit of equality, mutuality and complementarity according to the gifts and needs that each brings.

"To pursue the mission" presupposes that, though we have our distinctive identities, we have a kindred dedication to the poor as Louise and Vincent did.

By the same token, "to maintain fidelity to the spirit shared," implies an elusive, but perceivable *élan vital* that characterizes the lives and works of those concerned. In our case, for want of another term, I would suggest a certain "apostolic pragmatism" that finds whatever appropriate methods, ministries or means a situation requires *to serve the poor*. As an option for the poor, ours, I would suggest, is neither exclusive nor excluding, but preferential. This spirit tends to build bridges — between rich and poor; men and women; church and society; clerics, religious and laity. Though somewhat suspicious of institutions that de-personalize and distance, it sees flexible structures as necessary for the incarnation of value. This spirit exalts such virtues as humility, simplicity, self-sacrifice. These both protect genuine charity and facilitate identification with the poor in whom we find Christ and who compel conversion in us. Fundamental to this spirit is a profound trust in Divine Providence.

"Shared by distinct, yet related groups" means that though we claim our separate identities and take responsibility for our own directions, nevertheless we see ourselves as called to a certain sense of interdependence.

"Dedicated to the service of the gospel and Reign of God it proclaims" indicates the larger perspective, context and intentionality of such an effort.

In using the term "Vincentian Family", I am speaking of an adult and extended spiritual family, that is, of all those intentional groupings of people whose founding charism share in the legacy of Louise and Vincent. I think it is important to note the analogous use of the word "family." This extended family includes a first generation of Confraternities of Charity, Ladies of Charity, Daughters of Charity, Congregation of the Mission; successive generations of religious and lay communities of men and women together with their associate members and volunteers in ministry as well as associations of the faithful such as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul which claim the patronage of Louise and Vincent. Each group has its own particular charism, history, and specific mission. Yet we can recognize some affinity with each other. I suspect that the legacy of collaboration in works of charity may prove to be even more inclusive as the years pass.

No one group has a monopoly on the legacy. Each has its own special emphasis. Though still more of an ideal than reality, my community's legacy has emphasized its own collaboration among the lay and religious branches of what we refer to as the "Missionary Cenacle Family." Together, we seek to glorify the Triune God with the specific mission of preserving the faith among the spiritually neglected and abandoned, especially the poor. Our chief effort is to develop a missionary spirit in the laity. Among those aspects of Louise's spirituality that strikingly resonates with our own was her spontaneous Trinitarian prayer, her devotion to the Holy Spirit as leading to the Trinity, and her devotion to Christ crucified. She has been called a "mystic of the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

As we reflect and share today, I would invite you to be conscious of those facets of the legacy that your own group highlights.

On this occasion, I would like to acknowledge a debt we owe our first-generation heirs who have faithfully preserved and passed on the legacy. Some, including my own founder, have even created new initiatives in expressing various facets of the charism in more focused ways. I am especially grateful for their desire for more collaboration with their "kinfolk" of successive generations who are also heirs to the legacy.

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<sup>2</sup>Jean Calvet, *Louise de Marillac* (New York: 1958), 173, 179-81.

### Louise and Vincent as "Corporate People"

As Sister Margaret John Kelly noted at a previous conference, the relationship between Louise and Vincent was dynamic. It began as what may have been a somewhat dependent relationship of spiritual direction. It then developed into one in which she became a subordinate helper in the works of charity. For a period of time, it went through what seems like a somewhat independent phase of temporary alienation. Finally it grew into holy and healthy interdependence of collaboration and even friendship.<sup>3</sup>

I dare say that there are parallels to such dynamic relationship in the lives of founders and foundresses of other groups that share the legacy. It certainly is true in the case of my own — in the synergistic relationship between Father Thomas A. Judge, Mother M. Boniface Keasey, and Doctor Margaret Healy.

I would suggest that, as people who embodied and shared the founding charism, founders and foundresses assumed a certain corporate stature in that they are exemplars for followers who claim their spirit. In their mutual dedication to the poor, Louise and Vincent obviously grew in the mutuality of their own relationship and helped each other to grow in their relationship to God. I wonder if the groups that follow them have kept pace in that same dynamic of growth? I wonder to what extent our various groups of women and men — clerical, religious and lay — have moved from dependence to interdependence in a spirit of adult equality, mutuality and complementarity.

### Imaging the Future

"Future" refers to that aspect of human history not yet fully here except in seed and about which little can be known with certainty, but for which there is responsibility for human choice in the present.

We can assume different stances towards the future. One is to hold that the history continues to repeat itself and that managing the future means knowing the past. There is some truth to that. Another stance is to anticipate that changes in the future will be so radically different that it makes little sense to consider the past. There may be some partial truth to that. A third stance is to see the present emerging in continuity with

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret John Kelly, D.C., "The Relationship of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise from Her Perspective," *Vincentian Heritage* 11, no. 1 (1990): 77-114.

the past. In this perspective the future will be both creative and new, but will emerge in continuity with both past and present.

My own preference is for the latter stance as it seems more in keeping with my understanding of Divine Providence. The latin root of "providence" is *pro videre* which means literally "to see with" or "to see for." I would suggest that this implies the use of dynamic memory in looking to the past, creative imagination in looking to the future and collaborative action in the present. Thus Divine Providence may be viewed as God calling us to be co-responsible for and to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in shaping the future.

Some distinctions should be made between different kinds of futures: (1) *possible* futures, that is, what *could* happen, limited only by the scope of our imagination; (2) *probable* futures, that is, given current trends, what *likely* will happen; (3) *preferable* futures, that is, what *should* happen in keeping with our values and vision for the future; and (4) *plausible* futures, that is, what *can* happen when we attend carefully to the other kinds of futures. I would suggest that in collaborating to shape the future, we need to explore the possible, assess the probable, proclaim the preferable, and attempt the plausible.

And now for the meat (or, if you prefer, the sardines!) in the sandwich! I am going to ask you to meet in small groups. Begin by taking some time for personal reflection on the questions proposed before sharing in the group. The focus will be on listening attentively for whatever the Spirit has to say through the other members of the group as they share experiences of collaboration. We will then reassemble for some large group sharing followed by my concluding remarks.

Let me give you an example of what I am inviting you to do. After reading a draft of this, one of my collaborators shared a simple example of her own experience of a collaboration. I will use Mary's own words: "I reflected on my own experience of collaborative ministry with Mike ( a priest and fellow chaplain) at the district jail. What came up as important was the prayer with which we started each day, the concerns we shared for how the residents were or weren't being treated fairly and where we were with those instances. We met with volunteers who helped us and conveyed our hopes for ministry there. The actual 'collaborative part' seemed very simple as I thought about it." Perhaps we might take time now for such reflection and sharing around our own experiences of collaboration. And remember, if you find yourself hiding too good, get found kid!



## **An Exercise in Apostolic Reflection**

### *Personal Reflection*

- (1) Can you recall a collaborative experience of your own similar to the one I just relayed?
- (2) What significance does it have for you? How did you benefit? Where was the grace in it? What did you learn from any problem that arose?
- (3) Does it summon up for you any scriptural text or event? Any story in our legacy?
- (4) Did it (or does it) lead you to some deeper conversion in your own life or ministry, (for example, greater appreciation, conviction, commitment, choice, etc.)?
- (5) What might it say about a next step for future collaborative efforts?

### *Small Group Sharing*

- (1) As a group, gather for a few moments of quiet prayer seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit from the time together.
- (2) Each share something for your reflection with your group.
- (3) Listen for significant affirmation/challenge/insight.

### *Large Group Sharing*

- (1) What significant similarities/differences emerged in your small group?
- (2) What insights/ideas/suggestions emerged in terms of next steps towards collaborative ministries within the Vincentian Family?

## **Concluding Remarks**

### **Contemporary Challenges**

The sheer size and variety of the combined groups represented here testify to the fecundity as well as to what might be called the “democratization” of the legacy. In its devotion to and service of the poor, the rich legacy of Louise and Vincent has proven to be susceptible of universal translation. Though significantly shaped by French culture and spirituality of the seventeenth and subsequent centuries, the legacy has transcended them. Its holy contagion seemingly knows no bounds of gender, geography, culture, age, era, economic class, ethnic origin, or walk of life. For as long as the poor are with us, a heritage of charity holds a certain promise of perpetuity.

The legacy of Louise and Vincent is one of innovation and it seemingly holds a genius for finding structures that suit the mission. It seems to me what Louise and Vincent started was initially unique,

creative, innovative, flexible, and even radical for the times. They literally began new forms of dedicated apostolic life in the Church and demonstrated a remarkable flexibility in finding methods and means to serve the poor. I can think of few better expressions of apostolic flexibility than those well-known words of Vincent to the Daughters: "Your convent will be the house of the sick; your cell, a hired room; your chapel, a parish church; your cloister, the streets of the city or the wards of the hospital; your enclosure, obedience; your grill, the fear of God; your veil, holy modesty."<sup>4</sup>

It has always been a source of bewilderment for me as to how such a legacy could have become so quickly institutionalized. How much was due to a high proclivity for central control in the name of unity and stability that often fosters repressive uniformity and stagnation? In collaborative efforts to meet massive modern needs, can we recapture more of that spirit of innovation and flexibility today?

There have been attempts at collaboration in the past with meager results. Even Vincent tried to mix Charities of men and women with little success. Concerning the effort he observed, "The men and women together do not agree on points of administration; the former wish to arrogate to themselves all administration and the women will not tolerate it."<sup>5</sup>

I would suggest that collaboration has always been part of the legacy, but perhaps hampered by the dominance of cultural expressions that have become normative as well as by concern for preserving identity and unity. Hopefully we have reached a point of corporate maturity at which we have become more sensitive to needs for inculturation of the legacy and more secure in an openness to further collaboration. A question I would offer as a focus is: "Together can we find creative and collaborative ways of serving the poor as well as processes of apostolic reflection on those experiences in order to discern future directions?"

Vincent was also an advocate for the proper role of women in the Church. At one point he said to the Ladies of Charity:

For the last eight hundred years or so, women have had no public employment in the Church; formerly, there were some called deaconesses

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Calvet, *Louise de Marillac*, 9.

<sup>5</sup>Vincent de Paul to Etienne Blatiron, 2 September 1650, in Pierre Coste, C.M., ed. *Saint Vincent de Paul: Conférences, entretiens, documents*, 14 vols. (Paris: 1920-1926), 4:71.

whose duty it was to allot women their places in Church and to instruct them in the ceremonies in vogue. But by Charlemagne's time, by a secret exemption from Divine Providence, this custom ceased and your sex was deprived of all such employment, and ever since then it has had none; and now observe how that same Providence turns to some of you today to supply all that the sick poor in the Hotel-Dieu stand in need of.<sup>6</sup>

To what extent do we recognize and address continuing inequalities to which women are subject?

We are now more conscious of the global dimensions of the challenges, problems and possibilities that face evangelization efforts. Today, if the world were a village of 1000 people, in it, 564 would be Asian, 210 European, 86 African, 80 South American, 60 North American. There would be 300 Christians (183 Catholic, 84 Protestant, 33 Orthodox), 175 Moslem, 128 Hindu, 210 without any religion or atheist. Of these people, 60 would control half the total income; 500 would be hungry; 600 would live in shanty towns; and 700 would be illiterate.<sup>7</sup>

We have such a long and widespread experience of ministering to so many different kinds of poor people in so many settings. Each group brings specialties in accenting ministries with different classes of poor people — some Third World victims; others, immigrant minorities here at home; still others, the abused, illiterate, hungry and homeless. The litany is endless! Imagine the potential for collaborative ministries and reflection on these experiences of collaboration! In the sheer internationality of our legacy and presence among the poor, are we not strategically situated to address those issues in greater concert? As citizens of a First World Power with a disproportionate piece of the economic pie, what does the gospel call us to witness? In the realm of the possible, at least, can we envision a kind of "multi-national conglomerate" in solidarity with, advocacy for and service to the poor?

We live at a time when the growing problems of the poor have been recognized as systemic in nature and when the Church challenges all to an option for the poor that has always been at the heart of our legacy. Does collaboration seem not only apostolically pragmatic, but symbolically imperative as well? To what extent are we modelling, leading (or at least joining) efforts to combat systems of oppression and to equalize

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<sup>6</sup>Conference to the Ladies of Charity, 11 July 1657, *ibid.*, 13:810.

<sup>7</sup>Excerpted from World Development Forum, 15 April 1990, and appearing in *Utne Reader* (July-August 1990):144.

the imbalances between classes of human beings based on gender, race, ethnic background, economic condition, age, and the like?

We have in our spiritual heritage a consciousness of finding Christ in the poor we serve. The poor evangelize us as we minister to them. If Vincent was an "active contemplative," then Louise was certainly a "busy mystic!" Have we not a history of people such as Soeur Rosalie who were "noisy contemplatives?" To the extent that we try to embody such integration, do we not (at least potentially) have a special contribution to make for so many seeking a spirituality that integrates social action with spirituality and prayer?

Again, we live in times when, I believe, a major paradigm shift is occurring in evangelical communities inside and outside the Church. It does not seem clear what shape the future will take. Are we who share such a rich legacy of charity not in a privileged position to help read the signs of the times and help shape that future by marshalling our vast variety of experiences, collective wisdom, and combined resources? I would suggest that we have a privileged bellwether of things to come in the experience of our missionaries who labor with marginal people. They seem less hampered by status quo structures.

### **Obstacles to Collaboration**

If collaborative ministries are to become a plausible future, some deeply-rooted and culturally-imbedded obstacles must be acknowledged and opened to both personal and corporate conversion. These obstacles include:

- (1) for "openers," a pervasive individualism that is both endemic and inimical to our western American culture and that is resistant to the ascetism that true collaboration demands;
- (2) competitiveness between and within member groups that "protects turf," thwarts complementarity of gifts, saps energy, and taints motivation;
- (3) subtle *hubris* that leads to self-reliance and the building of personal or provincial kingdoms rather than dependence upon God and interdependence among us in the uncovering of God's Kingdom;
- (4) confusion of charismatic elements of our legacy with historically and culturally conditioned expressions of it that perpetuate antiquated structures and stifle enduring spirit;
- (5) corporate myopia that would limit the legacy to present institutional expressions of it and blind us to new and promising alternatives.

- (6) often as a consequence, comes an institutional sclerosis that fosters structures of control that homogenize people into uniformity, foster rigidity, depersonalize and stunt freedom and spontaneity;
- (7) failure to recognize the various gifts both groups and individuals bring and the substitution of roles for gifts in dealing with each other;
- (8) debilitating pessimism from a tyranny of probable futures that mutes the proclamation of preferable ones and that, in turn, leads to a focus on the greying rather than the greening of the legacy and the inevitability of demise;
- (9) quixotic optimism that romanticizes collaboration by placing it on excessive expectations and fails to deal with human imperfection, conflict and consequent on-going needs for reconciliation.
- (10) sexism on the part of men especially, (but not exclusively so!) that, at best, tends to patronize and, at worst, to dominate or to discriminate against women;
- (11) failure to appreciate the differences in modes of communication between men and women leading to unnecessary misunderstandings and subsequent division and alienation;
- (12) clericalism that promotes hierarchical inequality, elitism, privilege, life-style and financial security that fosters an unhealthy sense of independence, arrogance, or indifference in doing ministry;
- (13) failure to negotiate expectations with each other as a basis for accountability resulting in primitive, subtle and unnegotiated ones that become operative at primitive levels and obstruct accountability.
- (14) the occupational hazard of and addiction to busy-ness that often masquerades under the guise of apostolic zeal, but, in effect, masks an escape from intimacy with oneself and others, precludes reflectiveness, hampers communication, substitutes prayers for prayer, activity for genuine ministry and often leads to burnout.

A formidable array of obstacles! I am sure others could add to the list. All of them call for considerable individual and corporate *metanoia*. To respond, we need some honest self-assessment as individuals and as member groups; a deep reliance on the Providence of God along with a willingness to risk the untried; an openness to change behavior even before attitudes do; perseverance through difficulties and failures; a high tolerance for imperfection in ourselves and others; provision for ongoing reconciliation of inevitable hurts; the cultivation of a contem-

plative attitude both in quiet and in the midst of noise and activity; and the willingness to engage in processes of apostolic reflection with peers. Perhaps, it is not so much a matter of finding answers as being found by the Spirit. That would call more for a readiness and receptivity by being present where the Spirit is apt to speak and act.

### **Structure for Collaboration**

Translating ideas and ideals for collaborative ministries into plausible futures requires structure. For many, the word “structure” has negative connotations — confinement, oppression, formality, impersonality. Yet good structures are as necessary for individuals and groups as practical, human means to incarnate and to live basic values as flesh and bones are necessary for expressing human spirit. In faith communities, both charismatic and institutional elements need to be kept in poised tension; the former, to provide life and vitality; the latter to embody, protect, stabilize and yet allow for growth in life and ministry together. Hence, good structures will be freeing, flexible, personal, and hospitable to the Holy Spirit.

Mindful of the plight of the Visitandines, Vincent and Louise resisted structures of “religious life” of the time and yet showed genius in structuring works of charity. Our own Cenacle version of the legacy of Louise and Vincent as refracted through T.A. Judge seems to indicate something of a paradoxical suspicion of institutions that impersonalize, distance, and dilute service to the poor alongside an apostolic pragmatism that organizes efforts for being, doing, and empowering for good.

Translating ideas and ideals of collaborative ministries into plausible futures requires structures of readiness and receptivity. Again in these transitional times calling for “renewing,” “refounding,” “reweaving,” “reimaging,” etc., what forums can we utilize more responsibly and responsively to discern in the present for the future? How might the momentum of responsible exchange of this symposium be carried forward? Not discounting the possibility of new structures, might it not be better first to explore ways of improving the ones we have? It seems fair to say that most are less than enthusiastic about additional structures that require more meetings? These often prove to be time-consuming experiences that enervate rather than energize apostolic zeal and community spirit; that impede rather than facilitate the collaboration they are supposed to embody.

Specifically, is it plausible to expand the scope of existing collaborative structures within the Vincentian family so as to have more

inclusive membership from other groups and to build in components of apostolic reflection/discernment on our respective ministerial experiences? What if we occasionally "played Sardines" at meetings of pastoral teams and councils, faculties, staffs, committees and the like to reflect together more on our activities. At the symposium, Father Hugh O'Donnell posed two important questions: "How can we dialogue with our contemporaries and share our gift? What light does present-day experience shed on the meaning of Vincent and Louise for us?"<sup>8</sup> I wonder if, today, we are any closer to answers?

We have spent much energy in the important tasks of reclaiming the past and now need to be more reflective on history as it happens so as to prepare for the third millennium. There's a time for remembering and now a time to dream and do!

### **A Modest Proposal**

As a modest next step, I would suggest that processes of apostolic reflection/discernment are key to the future of our lives and ministry together. In seeking unity-in-diversity, not only might such structures mirror the Triune God, but they can lead to: (1) greater clarity concerning ministry and mission; (2) better integration of ministry and spirituality; (3) more mutual understanding, appreciation of and support for our various missions and ministries; (4) provide a rich resource for other groups who minister to the poor.

The phases of such a process would include: (1) describing a ministerial experience or community event; (2) reflecting upon it together both to find meaning and to relish mystery; (3) integrating it with scripture, theology and our own tradition whereby it can be further illumined and deepened; (4) discerning an appropriate response and determination of a plausible next step towards collaboration within the Vincentian family.

Again, obviously such processes imply some changes of heart for many of us that will call for dealing with significant resistances, chief of which may be that a pervasive spirit of individualism so woven into the fabric of our culture. However, perhaps in proceeding prayerfully in such processes, we might tap more deeply into the contemplative core of our apostolic vocations and find more gospel-like ways of being and doing together for mission.

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<sup>8</sup>Hugh O'Donnell, C.M., "The Relationship of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise from His Perspective: A Personal and Theological Inquiry," *Vincentian Heritage* 11, no. 1 (1990):74-75.

### Leadership for Collaborative Ministries

To facilitate movement ahead in collaborative ministries, we have in our mutual legacy a model of leadership eminently suited for the task; namely, that of Servant Leader. This is a leadership that comes from those who are servants first, that is, from people willing and able to accept leadership from a sense of service and to develop the skills needed to exercise it.

Such servant leaders are in touch with their own pain and powerlessness. Deeply rooted in God, they are committed to disciplines of personal prayer. As corporate persons, they are faithful to worshiping, supportive, and compassionate communities. Such leaders are able to relate well in a facilitative capacity not just to individuals, but to groups as such. They are apt at recognizing and calling forth gifts for ministry in others. Servant leaders are willing to work in a spirit of counsel, consultation, and collaboration with others. They are sensitive to the needs of the poor in inclusive rather than exclusive ways. Finally, servant leaders are alert and responsive to contemporary calls of the poor to mission.

I would suggest that this kind of leadership at all levels will be vital in shaping not only the future of church life in general and evangelical life in particular, but the structures of society itself as we approach the third millennium. We who share such a rich heritage face the challenge of developing such leadership.

### Conclusion

In summary, I would like to suggest that collaborative ministries are a way of glorifying the Triune God Louise so loved; of being Church together in the unity of the Spirit who led her to the Trinity; of being 'apostolically pragmatic' in incarnating a somewhat neglected aspect of our legacy in response to an urgent contemporary need; and, at a time of major transition in apostolic community life, of responding creatively in helping to shape the future;

I close with some verses for people who would journey into the future together. They are from the conclusion of *Journey*, written by Lillian Smith:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Lillian Smith, *The Journey* (New York: 1954).



A century from now, what shall be said of our human journey in these times? And who shall the shapers have been? ...

Will the rapidity of the journey move us apart or together? ...

A century from now, shall the fragments and pieces of journeying people have been brought together through the power of tender compassion or, perhaps destroyed ... by the powers of uncertain transition?

A century from now, who shall have shaped the future more?

The hopeful dreamers who were strong enough to suffer for the dream? Or the fearful pessimists who were convinced that dreaming and hope are for sleepers only ...?

A century from now, shall hope and humor have been strong enough to enable living with unanswerable questions? Or shall the pain that a transitional age necessarily brings have caused a retreat to the old answers that no longer acknowledge new questions?

We are — each of us — journeyers at once alone and unique while at the same time together. The age of space has taught us at least *that* much ... if indeed we doubted it before.

So the question is again the same ... A century from now, what shall be said of our human journey in these times? And *who* shall the shapers have been?

My prayerful hope is that we who share the legacy of Louise and Vincent will collaborate in the shaping. Let's get found together! Olly-olly-oxen-free!